

# Summer Food Service Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. What is the Summer Food Service Program?**

Just as learning does not end when school lets out, neither does a child's need for good nutrition. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free, nutritious meals and snacks to help children in low-income areas get the nutrition they need to learn, play, and grow, throughout the summer months when they are out of school.

### **2. Why is SFSP important to your community?**

Children who miss school breakfast and lunch are more likely to be sick, absent or tardy, disruptive in class, and inattentive. They also score lower on achievement tests. Good nutrition is essential for learning in school. SFSP provides an opportunity to continue a child's physical and social development while providing nutritious meals during long vacation periods from school. It helps children return to school ready to learn.

### **3. How does the program operate?**

The Food and Nutrition Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, administers SFSP at the Federal level. State education agencies administer the program in most States. In some areas, the State health or social service department, like the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), or an FNS regional office may be designated. On a local level, SFSP is run by approved sponsors, including school districts, local government agencies, camps, or private nonprofit organizations. Sponsors provide free meals to a group of children at a central site, such as a school or a community center. They receive payments from USDA, through their State agencies, for the meals they serve.

### **4. Where does the program operate?**

States approve SFSP meal sites as open, enrolled, or camp sites. Open sites operate in low-income areas where at least half of the children come from families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty level, making them eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. Meals are served free to any child at the open site. Enrolled sites provide free meals to children enrolled in an activity program at the site where at least half of them are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Camps may also participate in SFSP. They receive payments only for the meals served to children who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

## **5. Who can sponsor SFSP?**

Units of local government, camps, schools, and private nonprofit organizations can [sponsor](#) the SFSP. If your organization already provides services to the community, and has capable staff and good management practices to run a food service, you can sponsor the SFSP. As a sponsor, you will attend DHS' training, locate eligible sites, hire, train and supervise staff, arrange for meals to be prepared and delivered, monitor sites and prepare claims for reimbursement.

## **6. We're a small organization, what can we do?**

Many organizations, particularly smaller ones, may want to consider operating a feeding site, such as a recreational or enrichment program. Many sponsors would welcome such an arrangement. If you supervise a site, you will attend your sponsor's training, supervise activities and the meal service, keep daily records of meals served, store food appropriately, and keep the site clean and sanitary. You should contact DHS indicating your interest as a site, or find a local sponsor and make your own arrangements.

## **7. Who is eligible to get meals?**

Children 18 and younger may receive free meals and snacks through SFSP. Meals and snacks are also available to persons with disabilities, over age 18, who participate in school programs for people who are mentally or physically disabled.

## **8. How many meals do participants receive each day?**

At most sites, children receive either one or two reimbursable meals each day. Camps and sites that primarily serve migrant children may be approved to serve up to three meals to each child, each day.

## **9. How much reimbursement does the government provide?**

SFSP reimbursements are now based on the number of reimbursable meals served multiplied by the combined operating and administrative rate for that meal. For summer 2016, the maximum reimbursement rate per meal in most States is:

### **Self Preparation-Rural Sites**

Breakfast: \$2.1325

Lunch or Supper: \$3.745

Snack: \$.8875

## Other Types of Sites (Vended-Urban)

Breakfast: \$2.0925

Lunch or Supper: \$3.6850

Snack: \$.865

Payment rates are higher in Alaska and Hawaii to reflect the higher cost of providing meals in those States.

### 10. How long has the SFSP been in existence?

SFSP was first created as part of a larger pilot program in 1968. It became a separate program in 1975. More than 2.28 million children participated at almost 39,000 sites in the summer of 2012.

### 12. How can I find a site in my community?

To find a meal service site near where you live, contact organizations in your community that are offering an activity program. Organizations offering activities for children are often local schools, community centers, recreation centers, and faith-based organizations. You may also call the **WhyHunger Hotline** at **1-866-5-HUNGRY** or **1-877-5-HAMBRE** or check the website [www.whyhunger.org](http://www.whyhunger.org). As the summer approaches local sponsors announce program availability in their area and DHS will begin to share information on how to find sites across the state.

**13. What can I do if there are no nearby sites feeding children?** If there are no meal service sites in your area, you can mobilize your community to sponsor the program. In order for a site to exist in your community, a school, nonprofit organization or local government agency must be the program sponsor and be responsible for the administration of the program. To begin mobilizing your community, contact the following people and groups, and tell them there is an interest in the community to feed children in the summer. Contact:

- The school principal
- Teachers
- The Parent Teachers Association
- The school food service manager
- School officials such as the school board or superintendent of schools
- The Mayor's office Recreation and Parks Office County officials
- Elected officials

**14. I want to help, what else can I do?** Volunteer! Our best SFSP sites have organized, well-run activities that keep the interest of the children and teens coming back to the site

day after day. Some of these activities include arts and crafts, tutoring, mentoring, drama, sports, computer training, music, gardening, reading programs, cooking or any other creative ideas you may have. Many sites have enlisted local fire and police departments, local celebrities, local businesses and local political figures to make presentations to their SFSP sites. The only limitation is your imagination.

**15. How do I get started?** If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, or don't know of a sponsor in your area, contact the Tennessee Department of Human Services at (615) 313-4749, or email [TNSFSP.DHS@tn.gov](mailto:TNSFSP.DHS@tn.gov).